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The Onion Thrips

The onion thrips is a very small insect and may occur in large numbers and cause severe damage to growing plants before the cause of the trouble is noticed. The first hint of damage by thrips is a silvering of the infested plants. In feeding, thrips rasp the surface of plants and then suck out the juices. As the attack continues, the leaves and stems become blasted and distorted and later fall over and die.

Many garden crops and weeds are favorite food plants for onion thrips. Serious injury is done to onions, cauliflower, cabbage, beans, cucumbers and melons.

Control Measures

No control measure is known which is entirely satisfactory for these insects. Nicotine sprays are helpful. "Black leaf 40" or other commercial preparation of like nicotine content is diluted 1 to 400 of water, to which enough soap has been previously added to make the solution quite "soft." This is sprayed on the plants with considerable force. Care should be given to the covering of all exposed parts of the plants.

Start this spray just as soon as the first silvering is noticed on the plants and repeat at ten-day intervals until a few weeks before harvesting the crop.

Cabbage and other food plants should not be grown near onions since they serve as additional hosts for the insect and provide a place for hibernation. Since the insect spends the winter in refuse about the garden, much can be done in the way of control by destroying such refuse either by fire or burying it deeply.

Liberal use of fertilizers will aid the plants to outgrow the early damage caused by thrips.